



March 31, 2021

Dear Governor McKee,

We are writing together as the environmental community to urge you to support the Act on Climate bill when it reaches your desk. We ask that you sign the bill into law as it was passed by the Senate and House and keep the accountability and enforcement measures that would move Rhode Island beyond aspirational targets and position the state as a leader. The undersigned organizations stand ready to support you and the state as we work together to implement it. This legislation is the top priority for the Environment Council of Rhode Island, a coalition of over 70 environmental organizations and individuals, and many of the undersigned organizations.

The science of climate change is clear and unequivocal. To prevent the worst effects of climate change and also make the clean energy transition at the lowest possible cost to Rhode Islanders, the state must act quickly and decisively to decarbonize our economy by 2050.

The Act on Climate bill is simple. It calls on the state to create a plan to address climate change, and updates the 2014 Resilient Rhode Island Act in three ways:

- **Science-based Targets:** It updates the targets in the Resilient Rhode Island Act to be in line with the latest science. This means economy-wide decarbonization by 2050, with interim goals in 2030 and 2040 to ensure immediate and cost-effective action.
- **Enforceability:** The existing targets under the Resilient Rhode Island Act are voluntary. Massachusetts and Connecticut have both had mandatory, enforceable carbon emissions reduction targets for well over a decade. The success of these programs can give us confidence to proceed in Rhode Island.
- **Equity and a Just Transition:** This updated legislation specifically addresses the need for a Just Transition for environmental justice and frontline workers and communities, requiring input from “people from populations most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and at risk of pollution, displacement, energy burden, and cost.”

This legislation, while simple, sets the framework for how the state will address climate change. It is the foundation and framework we need to really reduce emissions and transition to a green economy in an equitable way. Rhode Island needs a solid foundation and comprehensive plan to address the climate crisis, a plan that is economy-wide and enforceable to set us on a path to a just transition to a green & sustainable economy.

What will it mean for Rhode Island to pass and implement this legislation as written?

- **Cost-effective Climate Action:** We are already seeing the impacts of climate change in municipalities across the state. From non-storm downtown flooding to sea level rise and increased intensity of storms followed by periods of drought. Rhode Island will need to do our part to not only reduce our emissions, but also adapt to a changing climate. With prior planning, as is required in this legislation, we can craft policies and programs that address the issue and are cost-effective for all Rhode Islanders, while creating other benefits to the economy.
- **Innovation at the Municipal and State Level:** We know that Rhode Island residents and municipalities are innovative. This legislation only requires that the state meet the targets; it does not prescribe how we do so. This leaves a lot of room available for the state and municipalities to innovate new policies and programs to address the issue in ways that make sense for Rhode Island.
- **Job Growth in Businesses across the State:** The Office of Energy Resources and Commerce RI release a report each year on jobs in Rhode Island in the clean energy sector. With the policies we have in place now, the state had more than 16,000 jobs in the clean energy sector in 2019. By taking a comprehensive approach to climate change policy and a just transition required under this legislation, we could see greater job growth in energy efficiency, clean energy installation, building retrofits, and green infrastructure. Massachusetts passed equivalent legislation in 2008 (the Global Warming Solutions Act). Since 2010, they've seen clean energy jobs grow by more than 52,000. The clean energy industry adds nearly \$14 billion to their economy.
- **Reduced Pollution in Environmental Justice Communities:** Some communities bear a disproportionate amount of the burden of the pollution associated with fossil energy. Rhode Island has the 9th highest rate of asthma in the country. Those who live closest to fossil fuel infrastructure or to highly-utilized roads (such as Interstate 95) are particularly at risk.
- **National Leadership Opportunities:** By comprehensively addressing the climate crisis with innovative policies to grow our green economy, we could be a national leader for other states to follow. Over the last decade, we have seen how the Global Warming Solutions Act has allowed Massachusetts to grow its clean energy sector, invest in its municipal resilience, and grow its economy. We have all the ingredients in Rhode Island to do this even better – and in a way that other states will be able to look to as a model as they craft their policies and programs.

The climate crisis is one that we have seen coming for many years. What we need now is political leadership from you to enable these policies and programs by supporting Act on Climate. A key lesson we've all learned through the COVID-19 crisis has been to trust science and scientists – and the need for statewide plans that incorporate understanding of the science and also respond to the realities and nuances of our 39 cities and towns. The science of climate change is clear and unequivocal. To prevent the worst effects of climate change – the effects of which are already being felt in Rhode Island – we must decarbonize our economy by 2050. The state needs to act quickly and decisively to benefit the generations to come. We stand ready to work alongside you and your administration to deliver a cleaner, healthier future for all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Acadia Center

Audubon Society of Rhode Island

Clean Water Action

Climate Action Rhode Island

Conservation Law Foundation

Environment Council of Rhode Island

Green Energy Consumers Alliance

The Nature Conservancy